

A back-to-back Adventure in the Northwest

Prolonged illness and injury this year has severely impacted our 50 State marathon quest. However, a non-refundable trip to the northwest had been booked long ago so with few long training runs, minimal mileage for me, and no way in marathon shape, we set off with trepidation from Tampa to Portland, Oregon. Six hours flying, 2,700 miles and a 3 hour time change served as a reminder of just how big this country is. We stayed in Portland Thursday night then drove 100 miles south to Eugene on Friday morning. The University there is known as the track running capital of USA, Bill Bowerman who went on to co-found Nike was head coach in the 1960's and produced many Olympic-standard athletes. We made an interesting side visit to a raptor center which contained examples of birds from the smallest hawks to the biggest eagles, had a quick look around the city, then picked up race packets at the evening outdoor expo.

The Pacific Northwest marathon was a point-to-point run between Coburg and Harrisburg, two small farming towns of about 1,000 residents each. The towns lie on a pancake-flat agricultural plain crisscrossed by a grid of dead straight narrow farm roads, west of the Cascade Mountains which are visible in the far distance. The crops had been harvested so the landscape was featureless, just a panorama of dry brown soil with the odd barn as far as the eye could see. The start was at 6:30am in the dark on Saturday morning, the course basically a series of long never-ending straights and 90 degree turns. The weather was dry and breezy, temperature around 20, much more agreeable than the 35+ with 80 or 90% humidity that we train in. The 300 runners soon spread out; many were running with earbuds, so there was much distance covered alone and in silence apart from the buffeting of the wind. Well stocked aid stations were every mile with enthusiastic volunteers, otherwise only a handful of spectators. One of the most boring races to date but to give credit the organization was excellent, everyone was individually welcomed, burritos and local grown fresh fruit were provided free at the expo and after the race, but unfortunately no beer.



After a quick snack we waited 90 min for the shuttle to take us on a 30 min ride back to the hotel. Then we drove through a fast-food joint and picked up more fuel, triple greasy cheeseburgers and 4-star cokes to consume on the two hour drive to Vancouver (Washington State, not the better known one in Canada) for Sunday's run.

Originally established in 1825 around Fort Vancouver, the city is located on the Washington–Oregon border along the Columbia River and is the oldest city in Washington. Once the largest western outpost of the British Hudson's Bay Company, it was the center of all fur trading in the Pacific Northwest because of its location on the Columbia River. It served as the military headquarters for much of the Pacific Northwest and has been recreated as the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

The event, called the Appletree Marathon, was themed around such a tree, supposedly the oldest living one in the Northwest, grown from a seed brought in from England and planted in 1826. They've made it into a bit of a shrine, made a park, and have The Old Apple Tree Festival every year. So there was apple cider, apple pie, pulled pork sandwich with apple cabbage slaw, apple crisp dessert and apple tree bling.



The course was a two-lapper, starting and finishing across from the fort in Officers Row, a wide avenue lined with large mature trees and having a row of magnificent mansions along one side which were homes for the army officers stationed there.



The mainly flat route initially meandered within the city passing through Fort Vancouver, The Army Barracks and Pearson Airport, the oldest operating airport in the USA and past the renowned apple tree which is definitely looking its age.



There followed a scenic out-and-back on an elevated paved trail along the banks of the Columbia River, passing through some pretty parks with trees in autumn colors, and onto a final section through the city

to the finish. The weather during the run was reasonably warm, windy, with some heavy showers and intermittent sunshine.



We completed the first circuit in good shape although we did slip in a few short walk breaks. It was pouring as we crossed the finish line to start the second lap which was not a good motivator, but it eased off after a couple of miles. Then the lack of long training runs began to show, and I went from quasi-runner to jogger to power walker to back-of-the-pack stroller. Great organization again, good crowd support, a varied and enjoyable course, and the sun came out to play for the after-race party on General Grant's lawn. An additional day touring the Columbia River Valley and waterfall of the Cascade mountains with odd stops in the vineyards completed a most enjoyable weekend. And that's two more states ticked off the list.